

Denying is Aligning

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year B: Lent 2: Mk 8: 31-38

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Jesus asks His disciples to deny themselves. What He truly is asking, is for them to align themselves with His priorities. Love neighbor. Love self. It might be losing self in the eyes of the world, but it's choosing Life with the Lord.

Many of you have served in the military. Or firefighters are in your family. Perhaps you've known a policewoman or police man. When the enemy advances, the fire station bell goes off, or the call comes over the radio, these folks know about heading straight into danger.

As NT Wright notes, they know exactly what it means to deny themselves. They serve to protect. Each day, they deny themselves all sorts of creature comforts: sleep, safety, time with loved ones. It is clear from day one that danger lies ahead and avoiding it is not an option. The danger is part of the calling.ⁱ

This is what Jesus tells the disciples. He will die because He will walk straight into the danger that lies ahead. Jesus is absolutely clear about His mission and calling. This is what the 'Son of Man' must do. Using language that has themes from Old Testament prophets Daniel and Zechariah, "the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed."

You and I are so accustomed to hearing about Jesus' death on the cross, that we can miss the shock of how those words certainly sounded to the men and women around Jesus who heard them first. Certainly, they had waited for God's Messiah to come. This one would end the occupation and lives of servitude they lived under paganistic Rome.

But die? Poor Peter, having just confessed that Jesus is Messiah, feels the whiplash deeply. We don't know exactly what Peter said, but it must have been something like, "Oh, no, Lord! This can never happen to you."

The absolute weight of Jesus' mission leads Him to respond harshly to anyone and anything that might get in His way. "Get behind me, Satan." Jesus is preparing Himself to deny His own life. The call is clear. Nothing will stop Him.

Our military personnel and first responders deserve our thanks and respect for what they do each day. For those of you who have walked straight into danger on our behalf, thank you.

Many of us in this room, won't ever experience putting our very life on the line for someone else. But today's text certainly asks us to reexamine our discipleship. Because Jesus has clear priorities for our lives. "If you want to follow me, take up your cross. Deny yourself." This is what being a disciple of Jesus means.

But what does that mean? What does it mean to deny oneself? You and I live in a culture that prides itself on getting most everything we want. Instant gratification doesn't lend itself to self-denial when we can stream hundreds of channels and have access to literally millions of products online. Within a few minutes and a few clicks, we have not only what we need, but also what we want. It's a blessing, or course...and has it's dark side.

Denial does not mean simply making a few little tweaks to our regular days. 'Oh, I think God will be pleased if I do this.'

Likewise, denial "does not mean a contrived kind of humility. We do not follow Jesus by demeaning ourselves."ⁱⁱ We're not supposed to just lay down and take it if someone starts beating us up. Or imagine that we have nothing to offer the world.

By taking up a cross and denying ourselves, Jesus is actually asking us to align ourselves with His priorities. Denying is aligning. And what are Jesus' priorities?

What did He say the two greatest commandments were? Love your neighbor as you love yourself.ⁱⁱⁱ

As a congregation we've chosen to align ourselves with Jesus' values by hosting SafeLot. Everyone needs a safe place to sleep. Most of us have a roof over our heads. But by utilizing our land to shelter others, we're loving our neighbor. We walked straight into the homeless challenge and provided an answer. We're denying ourselves by aligning with Jesus.

It's the same reason we promote ELCA World Hunger during Lent. We love to give to HNS, KidsPak and Larimer Food Bank. But ELCA World Hunger has a different scope. Their mission is to help people not only in the United States but all over the world. Loving "neighbors" by providing seeds for crops, money for family business, goats for milk, all align us with Jesus values. ELCA can walk straight into dangerous situations of drought and starvation, and literally provide life-saving medicines, food and water. That's denying by aligning.

Remember what Jesus told the disciples? After He would be rejected and killed, after three days, He would....rise again! Yes! Rise again. There would be new life. He would live. Being raised again will be the continuation of Jesus story.

When we deny ourselves, by aligning with Jesus' priorities (love neighbor as you love yourself), we do it so others might live!

In the ELCA video from the beginning of worship, the weekly meals at the church in Boston...one of the men said, "When I come here to the church, I get food, respect, hygiene." What human being – made in the image of God – doesn't need food, respect and good hygiene? We deny ourselves, so that others might live.

Our theme verse for Lent is Romans 6:4. Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life! If we lose our lives, we find new life!

What is the next right step for you, this Lent? What is one way you can align yourself with Jesus' great command of loving neighbor? Giving a financial gift? Going to volunteer at HNS or another organization? Serving dinner for our SafeLot guests?

What about the next right step in loving yourself? Increasing your exercise so you have more energy? Getting good sleep for heart health? Praying over a scripture

verse each day? We love God by taking care of our bodies, minds and spirits. Those are Jesus' values. And denying = aligning.

There is a board out in the narthex which we are inviting you to write your current practices and ideas on, so we all can more closely align ourselves with God. There is great wisdom within us.

May God bless all our efforts to walk ever closer with God this Lent. Amen.

ⁱ N.T. Wright. Mark for Everyone. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, KY. 2004. Pg 110.

ⁱⁱ Professor Michael Rogness. Working Preacher. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-in-lent-2/commentary-on-mark-831-38-3> 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.